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Forest Practices Board

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NEWS release

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Investigation Finds "High-Grading" of Forest on B.C. Coast

VICTORIA – A Forest Practices Board investigation has found high-grading of cedar and some spruce trees on the central and north coast of B.C. In an examination of 54 cutblocks, the investigation found that the valuable trees were selectively logged by helicopter, but at the expense of any future harvest opportunity and with no viable plan for regenerating the forest.

The harvest method involves selectively removing the valuable cedar and spruce trees, leaving behind mainly old rotting hemlock trees spread across the cutblock. This is commonly referred to as "high-grading." There is little likelihood that young cedar or spruce will grow well on these sites because of the low light levels under the dense tree canopy that remains.

The investigation did find that important social and environmental values such as viewscapes and biodiversity, often cited as the reason for using this method, were protected. The practice is also allowed under current legislation.

"This is a bit of a dilemma," said board chair Bruce Fraser. "On the one hand, government and industry want to extract some economic value from these sites and provide local employment and economic benefits, while also protecting other forest values. But on the other hand, the result is limited prospects for harvesting in the future."

"Government may decide this is entirely acceptable, but it is not consistent with current policy of sustained yield forestry and legislation that requires maintaining a future timber supply," said Fraser.

The performance of the forest licensees was variable, with some doing a better job than others and was also affected by the type of forest they were operating within.

The investigation found a number of other issues, such as provincial government policies that encourage this approach, professional stewardship issues involving the adequacy of prescriptions that professional foresters are writing for these sites, and licensee implementation of practices on the ground that are different from what was prescribed.

The Ministry of Forests and Range and the coastal industry are aware of the issue and have a working group looking at ways to improve harvest methods on these types of forest sites. "We are encouraged by the work being done on this issue and look forward to some solutions that will continue to meet the economic, social and environmental objectives of people in coastal communities both today and for the future," said Fraser.

The Forest Practices Board is B.C.'s independent watchdog for sound forest and range practices, reporting its findings and recommendations directly to the public and government. The board:

- audits forest and range practices on public lands;
- audits appropriateness of government enforcement;
- investigates public complaints;
- undertakes special investigations of current forestry issues;
- participates in administrative appeals; and
- makes recommendations for improvement to practices and legislation.

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One backgrounder attached.

This news release and more information about the board are available on the Forest Practices Board website at www.fpb.gov.bc.ca or by contacting:

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